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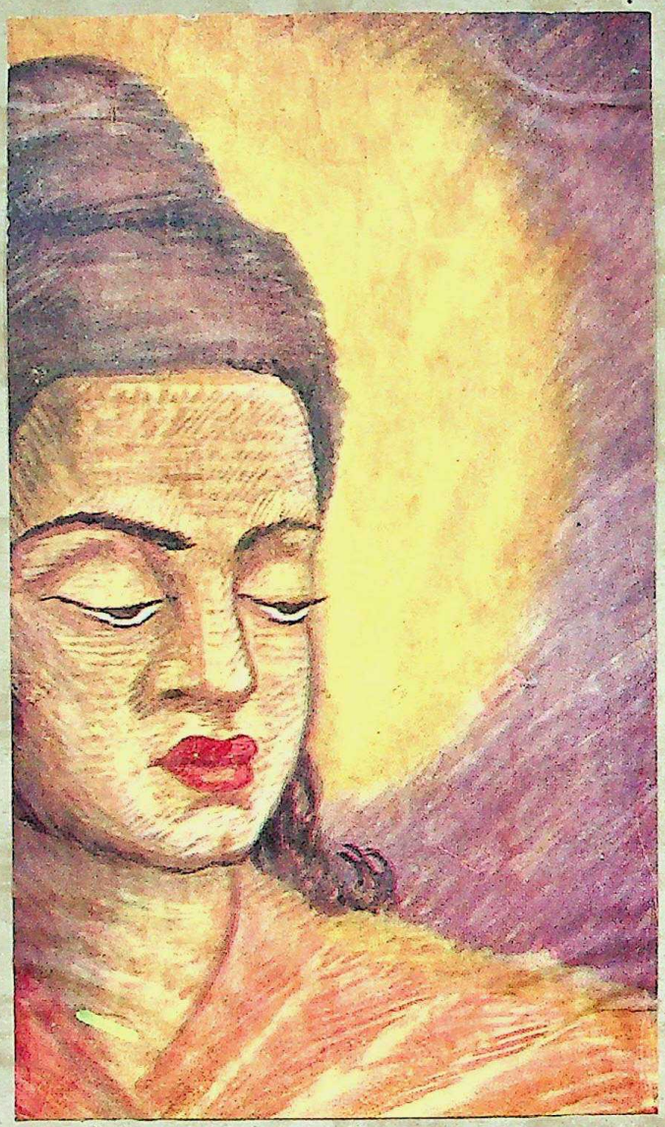

# THE ART OF

# BASUB TAGORE

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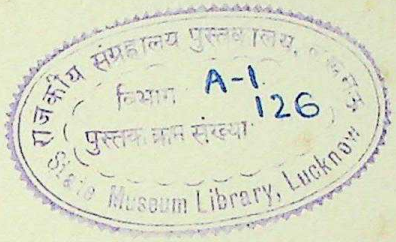
# THE ART OF BASUB TAGORE




EDITED BY

KRISHNA CHAITANYA

DHOOMI MAL DHARAM DAS

NEW DELHI.

Rs. 10.00

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO THE ETERNAL SOUL OF MAN YEARNING FOR LOVE, BEAUTY AND PEACE.

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State Museum, LUCKNOW

*Humayun Kabir*
*From a water colour sketch*
*by Basub Tagore*

FOREWORD BY

PROFESSOR HUMAYUN KABIR,
WELL-KNOWN INTELLECTUAL WRITER OF INDIA WHO IS ALSO SECRETARY, ADVISER TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION.
DECEMBER 26 1951

Basub Tagore is a versatile artist who has tried his hand at painting, sculpture and poetry. One dominating characteristic of all his work is restlessness and a quest for novelty. This is a reflection of his own life, for he gave up the security of a sheltered existence and volunterily chose the uncertainties of an artist's career. He inherited wealth but chose poverty, and has maintained himself for the last ten years by his paintings and sculpture. Born a Tagore, he is fully aware of the traditions and modes of the past but he is not afraid to experiment. This gives to his work great strength and vivacity and assures him a high position among contemporary artists.

I was very glad to visit his one-man exhibition and see some of his large scale paintings and studies. His drawing is bold and firm, and justifies his confidence in undertaking painting on a large canvass. His sense of composition is borne out in paintings like the *Egyptian Dream*. He has not only a fine sense of form but also a feeling for colour.

Mr. Tagore is perhaps at his best in portraits and studies, and shows great skill in blending the figures with the background. In *The Dark Beauty* he has used a gold background with exquisite effect. Similarly his portrait of an *African Belle* against a flaming background is beautiful in both drawing and composition. Paintings like *Mother and Child* bring out his strong lyric quality, and perhaps this is the predominent note in his paintings.

I understand that Mr. Tagore is thinking of going abroad on a sketching tour. With his sensitive skill and his feeling for strangeness and novelty, this should result in some memorable paintings. I shall look forward to seeing the work he does during his wanderings in foreign countries.

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# THE ART OF BASUB TAGORE

KRISHNA CHAITANYA

Poet, sculptor and painter, Basub Tagore now in his middle thirties still retains the restless energy of his adolescence and early youth, the insatiable urge within, which sent him wandering along the far-flung but charted lanes of the world and the more dangerous and uncharted labyrinths of mental and spiritual exploration.

Basub Tagore was born in Calcutta and had his early education at home. He received private training in art from a teacher who inculcated in him the respect for figure study and anatomical accuracy which has stood him in good stead in his career. After putting in an year at the Calcutta School of Art, he left for Europe in 1936. His first halt was Rome where he studied sculpture for a short while. Proceeeding to London, he joined the Royal College of Art and two and a half years later, obtained his Diploma. During holidays, he had opportunities of visiting the museums and art centres of France, Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden.

An exhibition of his work was televised in London in 1939. In 1940, another exhibition of his work was opened by Sir Francis Younghusband under the auspices of the Royal India Society. At the Royal Empire Society's hall, London.

A few books of Tagore's verse had come out before he left for Europe. In London, at the request of the Royal India Society, he gave a lecture on Bengali literature and recited selections of his own poems.

Tagore returned to India in 1941 and has been busy with various art activities. Recently he was in Patiala, teaching art and organising an Art Society.

The most striking feature of Tagore's poetry is the high frequency of claustrophobic images , winding staircases leading to closed doors, castlewalls too high, sunlit paths which get suddenly enveloped in heavy mists. Piloted up from the unconscious, these images are the symbols of an eager, restless spirit violently reacting against every restraint. This rebellious mood may have originated from the restlessness of the adolescent, ever in search of a goal or object which can give secure anchorage to its eager but not clearly formulated aspirations. In the case of Tagore, this exhausting quest develops a reverberating intensity, a prolongation and magnification which universalises the symbolic significance of this restlessness of the explorative human spirit :

Alas, I chased you through the ages from
Life to life.

With the advent of maturity, this intense but vague depression of the spirit gains content from an increasing awareness of the tragic element in the life of the Universe.

A village that grew from a little hut
Will be shattered by weapons of war.
Laugh, Lord of Destiny, laugh
These are life's little jokes played on life.

The malady of the soul has now become creative, for it leads the artist to introspection and the discovery of valuable secrets. When he cries out :

O ! do not tell me
I had wandered round and round myself
The centre to which I am tied.

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he has realised that the malady of the spirit is generated from within and therefore the cure should also start from within.

Thus begins the reconstruction of his personality. The riot of the senses is enervating and leaves you on the upturned glass of wine which is your throne, pondering bitterly over your past. But their disciplined use enriches the soul. The rippling waves of the Seine signal messages of peace, the night is like a benediction uplifting your heart till it gets entangled in the strings of the stars. If tragic elements exist in life, their significance is not quite negative, for it is at the door of death that the truth of life is often revealed. And if now an invocation to love is again made, it is done in a chastened mood, with the full awareness of the transience of things and more with a desire to enrich each fleeting moment with the plenitude which comes from human companionship :

On this darkened desert of life
Let us light a little lamp of dream
And as king and queen,
Let us enter the youth's palace of cards
And drink
The last drop of this honeyed moment.

Art is the impregnation of material entities with ideal contents. Matter is palpable to the senses and the artist's first task therefore is to discipline these instruments of the spirit. When Tagore painted in words a De Hooch like interior.

A streak of pale light
Lazily rolls down the dormant steps,
To lean against the pillar that shoulders the roof
And casts a tall shadow
Which mingles with mysteries

*One of the five plaques of The Late Arch Bishops of Bombay. Which are at the residence of His Holiness the arch Bishop in Bombay.*

he showed himself to be in full command of the powers of observation and expression which distinguish his work in other media.

His plaques of the Archbishops of Bombay bring out the excellence of his technique in larger masses while the statuette of *Finalist*, the Maharaja of Gwalior's racehorse, brings out in its taut form the sustained vigour of his execution in miniature scale. *Leda and the Swan* and *Daughter of the Sea* reveal Tagore's decorative sense and ability to organise rhythms in the most pleasing manner. In the *Birth of Peace*, the already gained awareness of tragedy generating positive values findes plastic expression in the figure of the beautiful goddess who rests her feet on a skull, the representation of destruction.

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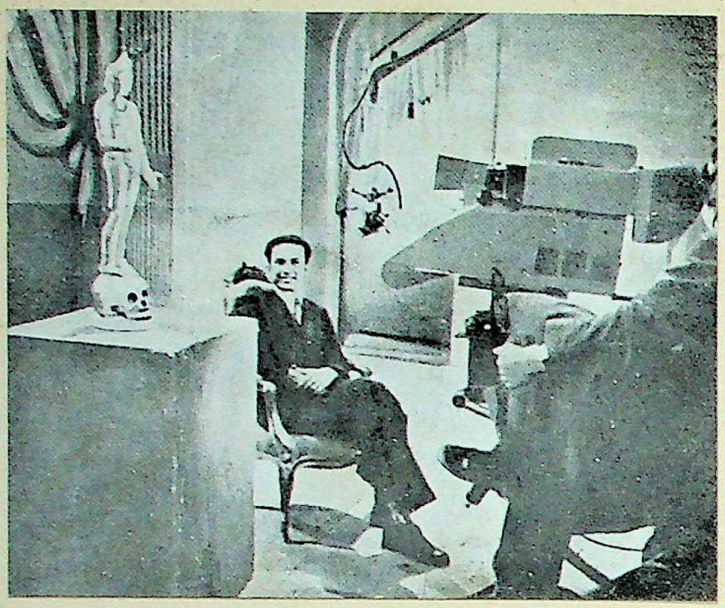
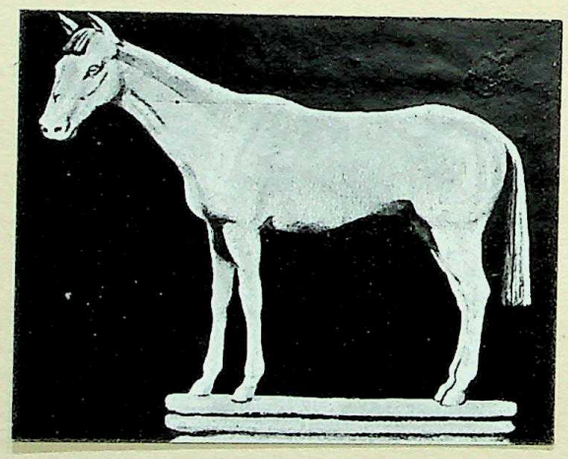
Tagore's paintings narrate again the story of the voyage of discovery, which we find in his poetry. In that surrealistic ensemble of cocktails, music, racing, the statue of Napoleon and the God of Destiny laughing, he comments with an irony that is cleansing though merciless, on his own life. This mode of symbolic exsression gains a formal universality in the superb Daliesque piece *Eve*. The disciplined imagination and hand get to work on such pieces as the *Mother and Child* and the *Dark Beauty* and have yielded results of flawless beauty in workmanship. In *Urvasi* he softens the rigour of the cubist style with the controlled use of curves, the beauty of texture and design in the garments and the expressive quality of the face. In *Nature and Progress* he deepens this style with symbolic significance. The *Chss board* is his comment on contemporary international political life and *War and Civilization*, his verdict on history. He knows the highlights in the contrapuntal movement in human history which sets itself against the pull and undertow of the destructive impulses and has cherished them in his paintings of Christ and Buddha, the former an ably handled cubist work where coloured areas bounded by straight lines are juxtaposed to build up plastic, third dimensional values.



*Arlist with the BIRTH OF PEAC being televised in London.*

Absence of neurosis can never be a superior condition to that in which neurosis was developed and subsequently resolved and personality synthesised at a higher level of integration, just as mere gaiety can never be a superior mood to optimism which coexists with the awareness of tragedy. Basub Tagore started with a malady of the soul but it has been fought and conquered.



*Finalist in netal*

That self-discipline, whose value he has fully realised, can be expected to yield abiding fruits in the years to come.

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OPINION OF

## HON'BLE SARDAR BAHADUR TEJA SINGH

WHO UNTIL RECENTLY WAS THE VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE EAST PUNJAB UNIVERSITY, IS NOW THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF PEPSU AND MEMBER OF THE MANAGING COUNCIL OF MANY WELKNOWN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF NORTHERN INDIA.

NOVEMBER 28, 1951

I could not but be impressed by the high kind of work executed by Shri Tagore. What struck me particularly was that in every piece of work that he takes up he tries to be original and represent what appears to him to be the spiritual as distinct from the physical aspect of the model that he has in view. At the same time he tries to keep up the traditions of Bengal and the famous family of Tagores which has done so much in the field of art and to which he has the honour to belong. Shri Tagore is by nature simple and modest and it is only natural that this trait of his character should be exhibited in some of his paintings but this has not deterred him from taking in hand big pictures with impressive background. ..

Shri Tagore has already made a name for himself both in India and in England as a successful artist....

---

"QUOTED FROM THE NATIONAL STANDARD. SEPTEMBER 11 1949"

Speaking on the art of Mr. Basub Tagore Mr. JOACHIM ALVA, Member of the Indian Parliament, Sheriff of Bombay and Editor of the News Magazine "Forum" said that Mr. Tagore who hailed from the ancestral home of Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore had already earned considerable renown on the Continent and the United Kingdom. He added that Bengal and the Tagores particularly were famed for their contribution to arts and it was fitting that Mr. Basub Tagore should have achieved such remarkable success in the field of Painting and Sculpture.

---

## OPINION OF Dr. S. M. ALI. Ph. D.

SECRETARY INDIAN COUNCIL OF CULTURAL RELATIONS AND AUTHOR OF SEVERAL WELL KNOWN BOOKS.
FEBRUARY 8, 1952

I have had the pleasure of personally knowing Mr. Basub Tagore for a number of years....

Mr. Tagore naturally had the rare opportunity of seeing from his early childhood his uncles Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganindranath Tagore at work....

Nevertheless one must say with confidence that Mr. Tagore is no imitator of the masters but has tried all throughout his life to go beyond where the masters left us. The present and future generations will decide how much success Mr. Tagore has achieved in his aesthetic efforts. I feel sure, however that Mr. Tagore is above all a sincere artist. That he has mastered the technique of painting, sculpture and bas-relief is obvious. He knows how to look at life and nature with emotion and intellect. All these should combine to make a great artist.

---

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OPINION OF
Mr. S. SEN. I.C.S.
DY SECRETARY GOVT. OF INDIA.
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.
(PUBLICITY DIVISION).

Even as a student he showed great promise and was elected an Associate of the Royal College of Arts. For past few years he has been practising art in various spheres and has established a reputation for himself....

With experience he has gained maturity and his restless imagination has found manifold expression in different media. The subtlety of his works has a personal appeal to those who look on life not as a summation of days and months but as part of a force which we can, at best, understand only imperfectly. On a more comprehensible plane, Tagore's knowledge of form and anatomy has given a remarkable quality to all his works.

OPNION OF Mr. A. S. RAMAN
16 FEBRUARY 1952.

....What I like most in Mr. Tagore's work is its serenity, which is enviable. He is particularly successful in his delineation of the Budha Motif, which is perhaps the most difficult to-day judging from the times we live in. For that matter, any religious motif, which, however, becomes remarkably evocative in his hands. He combines a passion for spiritual profundity with an aesthetic restraint that is very rare among our contemporary painters.

---

## "THE TIMES" LONDON. DATED JANUARY 16, 1940"

EXTRACT FROM AN ARTICLE

Our Art Critic writes:—The exhibition, which remains open today from 11 a. m. to 5, p. m. comprises about a dozen pieces of sculpture, including portrait heads, decorative panels, and symbolical figure subjects, together with a collection of water-colour designs and drawings by the same artist. After studying at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, Mr. Tagore, who came to this country to complete his artistic education at the Royal College of Art, where he obtained his diploma. He both models and carves and his work shows a more than usually successful attempt to preserve Indian inspiration and feeling in Western technical methods. "Wind Nereid" and a "Head study of a woman," both modelled for bronze casting, and "Woman with deer," a decorative panel in carved stone, are good examples of Mr. Tagore's work.

The London Exhibition was opened by Col. Sir Francis Younghusband K.C.S.I. The soldier, explorer and Philosopher who was at that time Chairman of the world parliament of reiligion. Sir Francis paid high tribute to Mr. Tagor's contribution to art as well as the whole of India.

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## THE STATESMAN 14 SEPTEMBER 1949.

EXTRACT FROM AN ARTICLE

....His Sculptured heads have the merit of great simplicity and his flair for decoration comes out at its best in his Bucefhalus-Bookends which are quite the most outstanding feature of the Exhibition.

*Bucephalus Bookends.*

In painting he is similarly at his best when his object is decoration as in the attractive picture Sidharta and his interesting study War and Civilisation. His picture Alert is a study of two deer and has the charm of fresh direct water colour painting with no conflict of techniques.....

## EXTRACT FROM AN ARTICLE IN THE ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA, CALCUTTA

JULY 19, 1939.

The prestige of Indian Art abroad has been enhanced by the appreciation mhich the work of Basub Tagore has received in Europe.

TRANSLATED FROM BENGALI.

On account of shortage of space it is much regreted that the above articles could not be reproduced in their full text.

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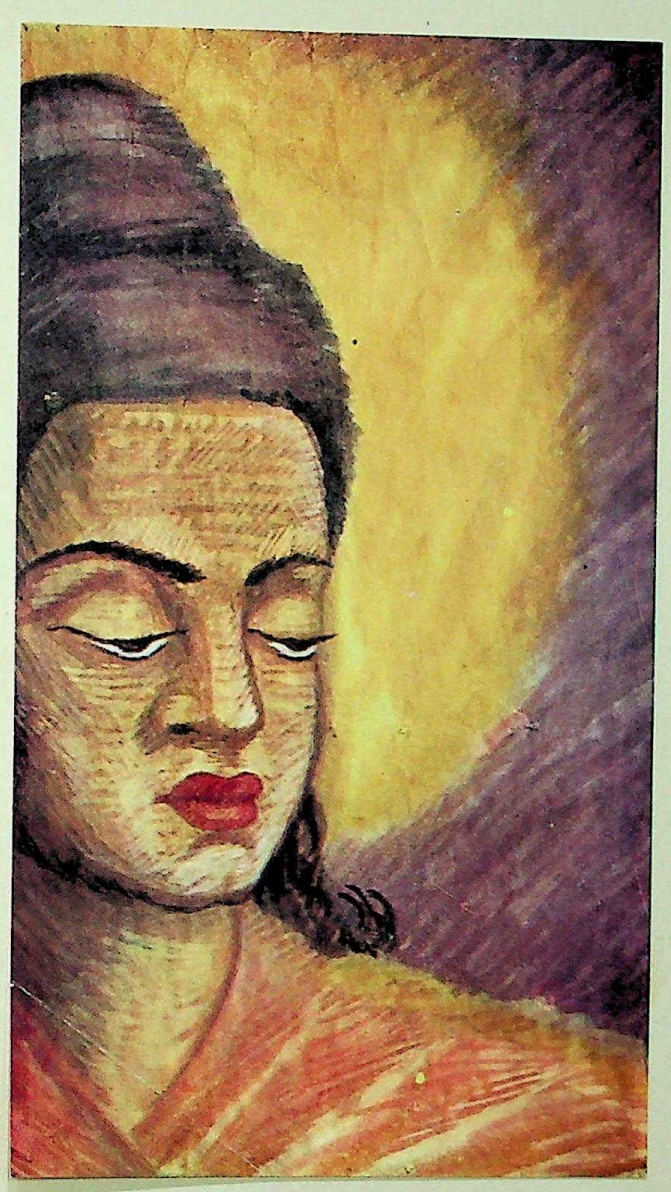

BUDDHA
WATER COLOUR. 3'X18"

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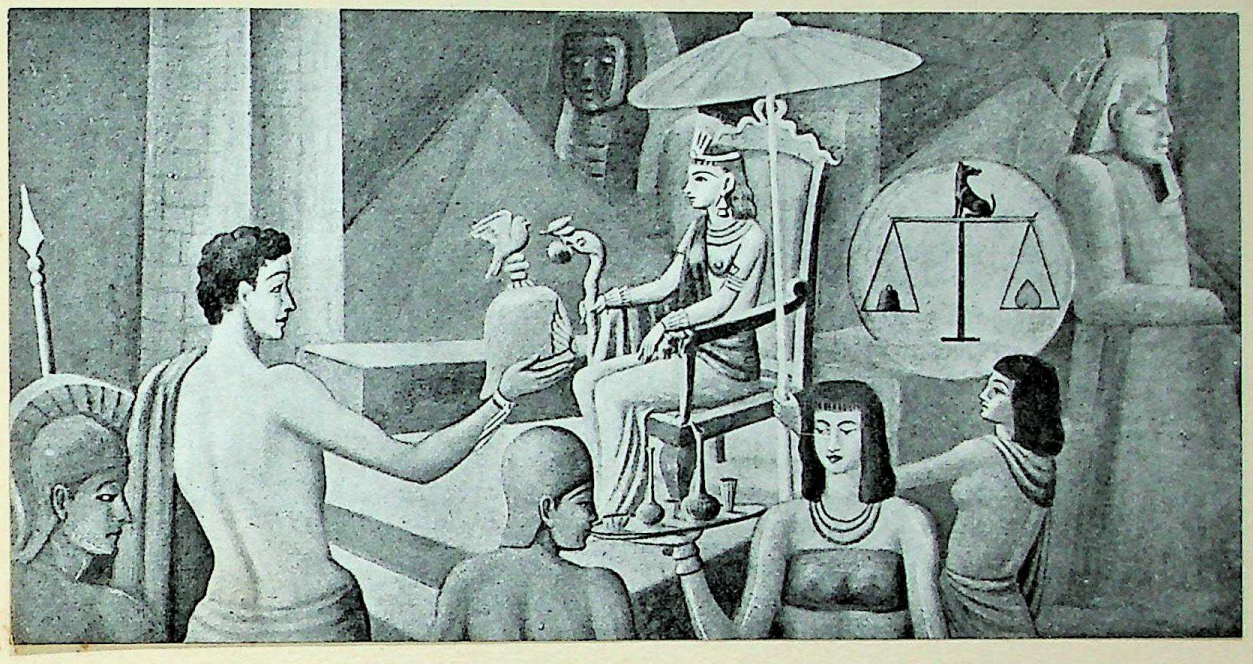

THE EGYPTIAN DREAM (CLEOPATRA)
IN OIL. SIZE 7'X4'

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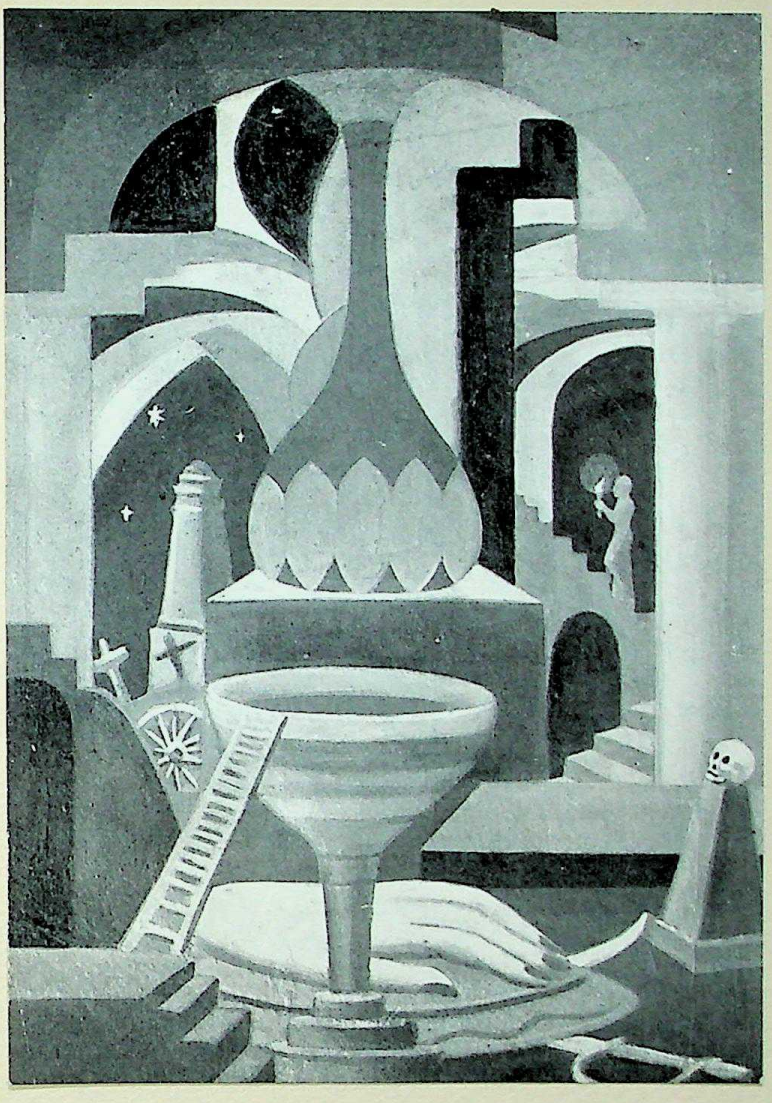

THE GREAT INTOXICATION (LIFE)
IN OIL. SIZE 23''x18''

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MOTHER AND CHILD
IN OIL. SIZE 4'x3'

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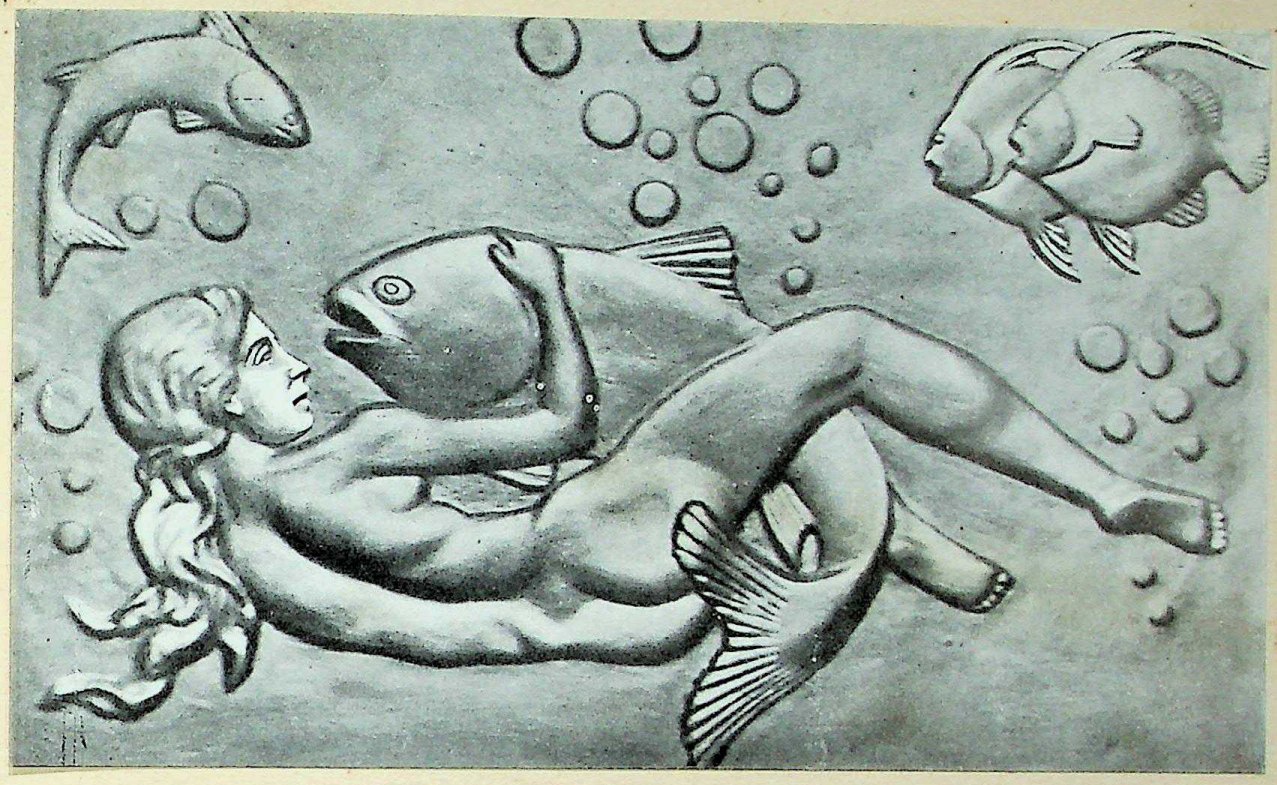

THE DAUGHTER OF THE SEA

BAS-RELIEF. SIZE 30"x20"

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EVE

WATER COLOUR. SIZE 1'x9"

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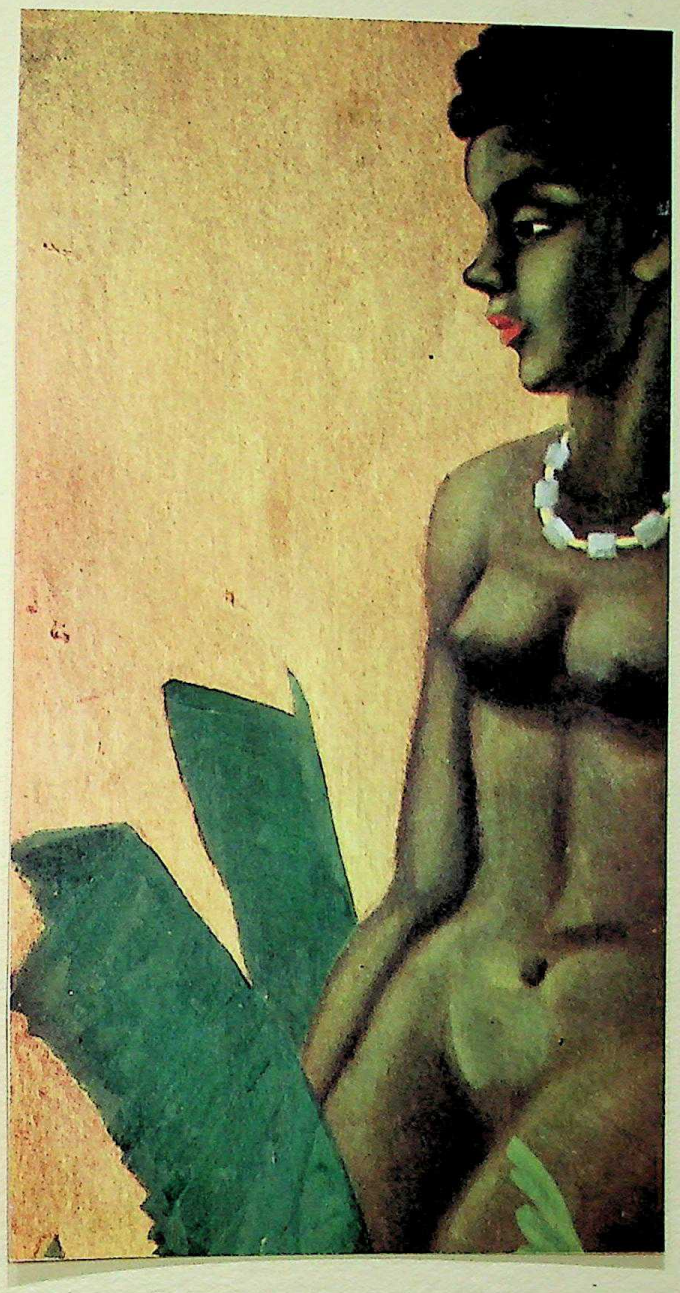

THE DARK BEAUTY
IN OIL. SIZE 20"x30"

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LEDA AND THE SWAN

BAS-RELIEF CARVING IN MALTA STONE. SIZE 4'x30"

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THE CHESS BOARD
WATER COLOUR. SIZE 10"X7"

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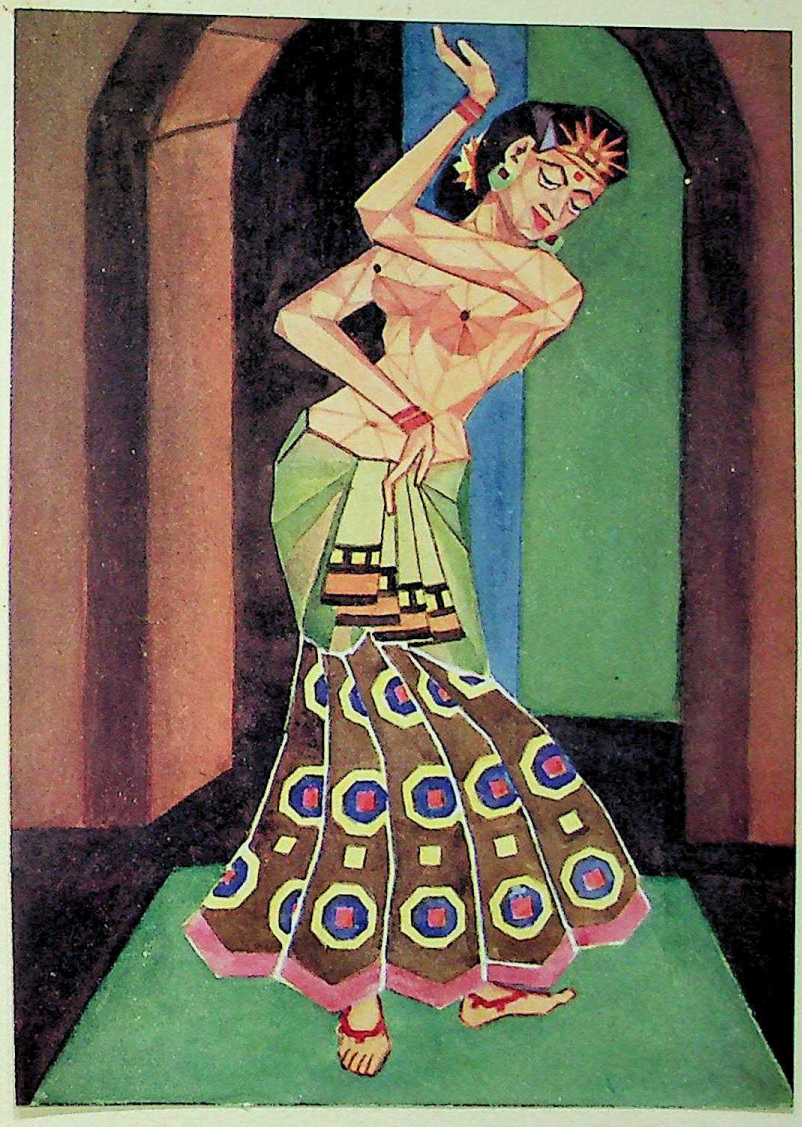

URVASI
WATER COLOUR. SIZE 10"x6"

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MEMORIES
IN OIL, SIZE 2'X1'

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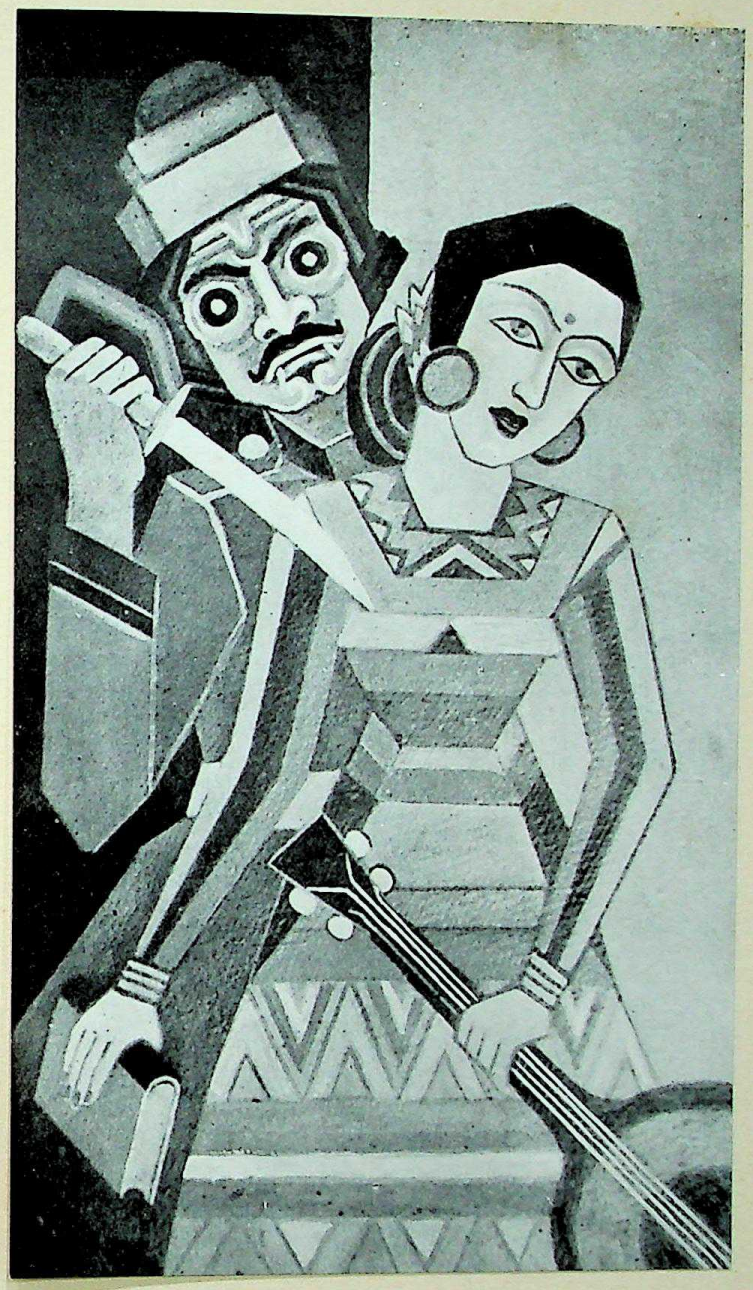

WAR AND CIVILISATION
IN OIL. SIZE 2'X1'

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